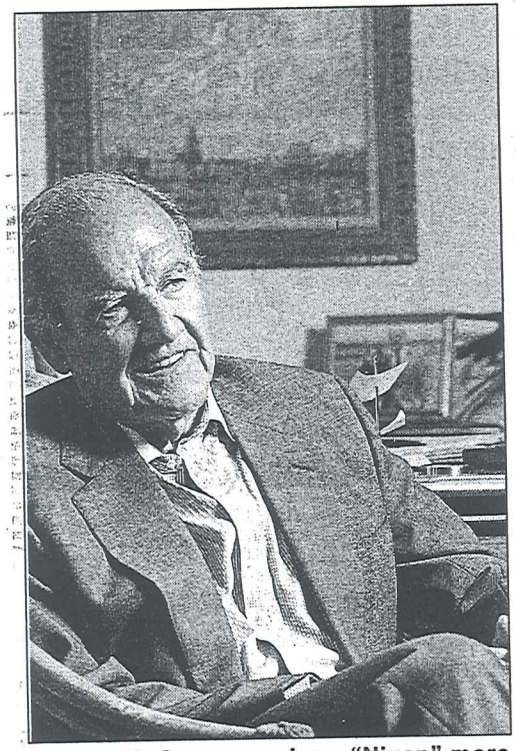
Old rival McGovern

MOVIE REVIEW



George McGovern reviews "Nixon" more than 20 years after running against him.

The following review of the Oliver Stone movie "Nixon" was written for Gannett News Service by George McGovern, the former Democratic senator from South Dakota, who challenged Nixon for the presidency in 1972.

By GEORGE McGOVERN

Watching Oliver Stone's three-hour film about my old 1972 nemesis, Richard Nixon, was not something I had eagerly planned for the Christmas season. I'm glad, however, that an agreement to review this film led me to see it early on.

Let me state up front: This is the best movie I have seen in many months. It seized my attention and had me involved emotionally and intellectually from the opening moment. I nominate the movie, its director and the central actors as the best of the year. Anthony Hopkins, surely one of the greatest actors of our time, captures Nixon in a dramatically convincing way. How could anyone surpass him for the Academy Award? Joan Allen, who plays Pat Nixon brilliantly, should be named the year's best supporting actress.

Few, if any, people outside the family really knew the Nixons well. Oliver Stone and the actors in this film have done a brilliant job of giving insight and coherence to what we do know about this troubled and driven president, his stoic wife and the men who surrounded them.

This is not a documentary detailing every historical event "accurately." It is a drama, offering revealing insights into the character and motivations of a complicated politician. Anyone with even a casual interest in American politics will be fascinated by this film.

It is obviously impossible for any director to treat a historical figure so controversial and contradictory as Richard Nixon in a way that those who admired

calls 'Nixon' fair

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him and those who despised him will agree is fairly balanced. Oliver Stone comes close to achieving that balance and fairness in this film.

It has been reported that the Nixon daughters, Tricia and Julie, are distressed over the movie. I'm sure that no director could do a film about me that would satisfy my daughters and my son. But knowing the Nixon daughters — not well, but favorably — I believe when they are able to view this film with a little more emotional distance, they will see a rather sympathetic portrayal of their father's better qualities and their mother's special strengths.

Nixon on the screen contends that his most difficult and important political achievement was coming to terms with the communists in China, the Soviet Union and Vietnam without setting off a right-wing rebellion in the United States. That was also his view in real life. It is doubtless a justifiable view of his presidential achievements.

Nixon was a political realist willing to sacrifice other principles and other people for personal political gain. His political yearnings were shaped by personal angels and demons from his childhood. These are the messages of this drama. He also longed for a high place in history as a strong and imaginative political leader.

All in all, I commend this film to my fellow citizens. Both the Nixon haters and the Nixon lovers will find it gripping, as will those with fewer preconceptions about our late president.